

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 21, 2017

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Minority Whip
United States Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Whip Durbin,

As you continue negotiations on protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and border security, we write to express our opposition to the funding and construction of border walls. We ask that you pay careful attention to the damaging impacts that a border wall will have on the property rights of landowners and on the National Wildlife Refuges that are located along our southern border. The mission of our National Wildlife Refuge System, the conservation of wildlife resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans, should not be sacrificed for a wasteful and ineffective border wall.

However, according to the Rio Grande Valley Border Patrol Sector, the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge will be the site of the first section of border wall.¹ This Refuge is home to at least 400 species of birds, 450 types of plants, and half of the butterfly species found in North America. It is also the natural habitat for the ocelot and jaguarundi, two highly endangered cat species. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife report from 2016 found that more than 100 animals that are listed as endangered, threatened, or candidates for protection under the Endangered Species Act could be affected by the border wall.²

The proposed border wall threatens habitats beyond the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Sites set aside by the Federal government for conservation and protection, from the Otay Mountain Wilderness Area, the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, to the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge, will be irreparably harmed by the fragmentation of their ecosystems. Border walls also exacerbate the risk of flooding. In 2008, debris piled up against the border fence

¹ Christian Von Preysing, *Wildlife Refuge Site Selected as Start of Border Wall Construction*, KRGV (December 13, 2017), <http://www.krgv.com/story/37063465/wildlife-refuge-site-selected-as-start-of-border-wall-construction>.

² U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Trump Wall: IPaC Trust Resources Report* (May 3, 2016), available at http://www.veritasresearchconsulting.com/USFWS/USFWS-Trust_Resources-TrumpWall.pdf.

along the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument causing water to pool up to a depth of seven feet.³

The border security decisions made today will have a lasting impact on the wildlife of our country and on the Americans that call the border home. We ask that you please consider the damage that border walls will inflict on endangered wildlife before you reach any decision on border security. Should you have any additional questions or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



FILEMON VELA
Ranking Member
Border and Maritime
Subcommittee



BENNIE THOMPSON
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



RAUL GRIJALVA
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources

³ Brady McCombs, *Report: Faulty design turned border fence into dam*, Tucson.com (August 15, 2008), http://tucson.com/news/local/border/report-faulty-design-turned-border-fence-into-dam/article_fe6f1f2f-5820-5c08-be14-cf037a69ace8.html.